

Reflections on Interfaith Dialogue: basis, aims & needs

(A Historical and Analytical Study of Interfaith
Dialogue in the Islamic Perspective)

By:

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Abstract

The meaning of dialogue according to Quran, Hadith and the Muslim scholars will be discussed. A brief history of dialogue in Islam and the foundations laid for dialogue by the Muslim scholars will be described. This will be helpful for the Muslims to know how to go for dialogue with the people of other religions. There are different kinds of dialogue according to Muslim scholars. They have got different opinions about dialogue. Here, it will also be explained how dialogue took place in the past among Muslims and with other religions and its results on their relations. There are principles for dialogue according to the Holy Quran and the life of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), which helped in developing friendly relations with the followers of other religions. These also inform us about the purpose of dialogue.

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A. Meaning of Dialogue and its different Dimensions:

Hewar (حوار) is an Arabic word used for dialogue. It means the conversation between the two groups in a civilized manner.¹ It avoids contradictory discussions and is used to convey thoughts to each other in a friendly atmosphere.² Furthermore, *hewar* (حوار) emphasizes to listen the viewpoint of other people with tolerance. In the Holy Quran, there have been mentioned many Prophets (peace be upon them) who went for dialogue with the people of their respective age. Through this, they made the people aware of the truth. They guided the mankind to the way of God.³ The Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) had dialogue with the polytheists of Makkah, Jews of Madina and delegation of Najran. Not only that, he also wrote letters to the rulers of many countries.⁴ This was meant to guide them to the right path and convey them the message of God in its true sense.

This clearly shows that Islam lays stress on having conversation with the people of other religions, to study them and to convey them the message of Islam. In fact, this is an important duty that Islam imposes on its followers. These conditions and incidents led the Muslims to study other religions and laid foundations for the dialogue according to the teachings of Quran and Hadith. These are the Muslims who first of all established institutes for the study of comparative religions.⁵ Islam has very clear concept of dialogue and agreed aims for it. This is contrary to Christianity where dialogue differs in its aims and sense. In Islam, dialogue has its foundations fourteen centuries ago whereas Christians started dialogue in 19th and 20th centuries. Islam is basically a religion of invitation and reformation. Therefore, dialogue has got much importance. To have relation with the worst

¹-Alam-e-Islam aor Esayait, (Institute of Policy Studies, vol.3, No.7 Islamabad, March 1993), p.63

²- Al-Manhal, (monthly), (Saudi Arabian, Jeddah: vol.68, No.601, (March, April 2006), p.63

³- Ahmed, Zamzami, Al-Hewar, (Jordan, Amman: Darul-Muali, 2002), pp.33-35

⁴-Dawah, (Dawah Academy, I.I.U. vol.xv, No.4 Islamabad, April, 2004), pp.7-13

⁵ Muhammad, Dheen, Min Manahij-il-Ulama-e-Muslimeen fi Dirasat-i-Adyan, (art) Al-Howliya, Al-Jamia Al-Islamia Al-Alamia, Islamabad: International Islamic University, vol.3, 1995), pp.82-85

enemies of Islam through dialogue is a part of invitation. A clear example of this is when Allah Almighty ordered Hazrat Mosa (peace be upon him) to go to Pharaoh and invite him to Islam, he has exceeded the limits. Hazrat Mosa (peace be upon him) was instructed by Allah Almighty not to be harsh to him. Rather, to converse with him in a polite way so that he may turn to the right path. Thus, there is hate for polytheism and anti-Islamism but these people must continuously be invited to the truth through dialogue because polytheism is hated and not the polytheist.¹

Islamic mood of invitation demands no compromise on propagation and security of Islamic belief system, culture and social values. However, to have dialogue with other nations having complete freedom of thought is an important part of Islamic invitation. Thus, Quranic teachings regarding people of Book are to call them to initiate dialogue on common basis. The co-operate affairs should be taken into dialogue. The conflicting issues must also be discussed with mutual respect.²

Dialogue has great importance in modern academics. The Western scholars have advances in dialogue and are considered as pioneers in this field. The Muslims have also got such able personalities who depend on the Holy Quran and Sunnah for religious dialogue, to benefit all mankind in general. For this, Muslims need to equip themselves also with modern learning in a modern society. Islam can propagate its message through dialogue. In the Holy Quran we find dialogue as the only way to promote its teachings. So Muslims should guide the others in the same way to the right path and real happiness. Without Muslims' participation in the process of dialogue directly, Islam cannot flourish properly. There should be a dialogue system in which others should be invited. Muslims should also participate whenever and wherever invited for dialogue. For dialogue, there should be some suitable place, time and topic. The participants must have well understanding of others' culture, language and religion.³

It is a misconception that dialogue has been an exercise of inter-religious theological discussion whereby the participants try

¹-Islam aor Mughrib, (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, vol.5, Issue No.10, March 2001), pp.6-7

²- Ibid. pp.6-7

³-Muhammad, Dheen, Al-Muslimoon Wa Al-Kherita-tud-Deenia Al-Alamia Al-Muasarah, (Egypt: Dar-UI-Hani, Littibaat, 2004), pp.184-186

to prove the truth of their respective religions. In fact, dialogue is based on mutual respect, understanding, and recognition of the differences.¹

Dialogue within the Islamic thought has got significant achievement. The participants feel security, confidence and trust enough to argue their competing understandings and interpretation of their religions. The common grounds for Muslim-Christian dialogue should be defined in positive terms. These may be our awareness and moral obligations dictated by our religion. Hence, in dialogue the participants defined the rights and welfare of all people out of religious ideas. In this way, the participants also get a chance to extend and promote their religious message.²

It may be concluded that it is the Muslims who have rightly comprehended the nature of dialogue. It is not to prove one's own religion rather it is mutual respect, understanding and recognition of differences. The participants define rights of humans in general. Dialogue also results in the promotion of one's own religion.

B. Dialogue according to Contemporary Muslim Scholars

In this segment, there will be described very briefly the meaning of dialogue in the dictionary and definition of dialogue according to Muslim Scholars along with describing the meaning of dialogue in Islam – Islamic Point of View – and its kinds. Furthermore, dialogue is a modern terminology with no permanent legal logic too. That would clarify its usage from different angles.

Prof. Muhammad Talbi says: "The dialogue is necessary and vital for Islam so that it can re-establish its contact with the world. This is all over the more urgent salutary for Islam than for other religions since many of them never really lost this contact.

¹- Saif, Walid, Reflections on Muslim-Christian Dialogue, [Core Values and Common Responsibilities], (art) Encounters, (London, Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, Mark field, vol.7, No.1, March, 2001), pp.91-94

²- Saif, Walid. An Assessment of Christian-Muslim Dialogue, (art) Current Dialogue, (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council Of Churches, December 2000), p.30

Islam, moreover, calls to dialogue with other people, and especially with the people of the Book, by its scripture, no less".¹

So, Talbi has demonstrated the importance of dialogue in a very effective way. For Islam, to have contact with the world, there is no other option except dialogue. It cannot be avoided, rather it must be adopted.

Dialogue to Faruqi means to concern oneself with learning others' convictions, to analyze and criticize them and to share with their adherents one's own knowledge of the truth.

"Dialogue is the removal of all barriers between men for a free intercourse of ideas, where the categorical imperative is to let the sounder claim to the truth win. The final effect of dialogue should be the establishment of truth and its serious free candid and conscious acceptance by all men".²

As mentioned above, dialogue is a means to get different groups with different ideas closer to each other. There is a chance of developing understanding between two or more groups. In the end, truth is established which all the men have to accept.

Dr. Ansari in his "Reflections on Islamic Bases for Dialogue" proposes that Muslims could spell out and, together with Jews and Christians strive for such values that would please God.

According to Ansari, "The need for dialogue with people of other religious convictions arises from the concern of Muslims with the welfare of their fellow beings. Muslims are under the obligation to bear witness to the truth revealed to Muhammad (peace be upon him) and prompter to share it with the rest of humanity. Ansari suggests that the Muslim's attitude towards people who decline to identify themselves with Islamic doctrines ought to be one of mutual fellowship and cordiality (without

¹ Jacques, Waarde, Burg (ed.), Islam and Christianity, [Mutual Perceptions since the mid 20th Century], (PEETERS-BONDGENOTENLAAN, 153-B-3000, LEUVEN, 1998), p.246

Note: Talbi's article "Islam and dialogue" is regarded by many people as one of the most important work yet written about Christian-Muslim dialogue.

² Al-Faruqi, Raji Ismail. Islam and other Faiths, (ed.) (Siddiqui, Ataullah) (UK, Leicester: The Islamic Foundation and the International Institute Islamic Thought, 2000), p.248

compromising the Muslim duty to make the word of God prevail), if such persons refrain from active hostility to Islam and Muslims".¹

Ansari's point of view is also remarkable. Dialogue with people of the Book is needed for the welfare of Muslim fellow beings. Muslims are obligated to share the truth with others. Through dialogue non-Muslims can be refrained from active hostility to Islam.

Ismaeel Ibrahim says, this dialogue has taken different paths; theological, communal and political. On the religious level, we must recognize that there are some irreconcilable theological differences to gather for monotheistic beliefs and moral goals that we hold in common. On the contrary, while acknowledging that the positive values which each community cherishes and forge ahead to work together for the betterment of God's creation.²

Though there are differences between Muslims and Christians in religious spheres, yet there are many fields that are common in both, for example, charitable activities, protection of animals and environment etc. For that reason, dialogue in the field of service of God's creation can take place.

According to Dr. M.M. Dheen Muhammad who was the head of Department of Comparative Religions in the Faculty of Usuluddin IIU Islamabad, the dialogue here does not mean doubt in the faith as in dictionary, but it means non-violence scientific method in the comparative religions which was not known before except after the ascendant of Holy Quran.

The previous religions or people do not find this method in their holy books or in their resources and the western people in the Medieval Age, or in the age of Islam never known as the term of dialogue in their religious faith they do not believe it.³

¹ - Von Denffer, Ahmad, Some Reflections on Dialogue between Christians and Muslims, (UK, Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1989), p.18

² - Ansari, Zafar Ishaq, and Esposito, John L. (ed.), Muslims and the West, [Encounter and Dialogue], (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, IIU 2001), pp.42-45

³ - Muhammad, Dheen, Min Manahiji-il-Ulama-e-Muslimeen fi Dirasat-i-Adyan, (art) Al-Howliya, Al-Jamia Al-Islamia Al-Alamia, Islamabad: International Islamic University, vol.3, 1995), pp.93-94

Dr. Abdul Aziz Tawaizri says, in modern cultural and political thinking dialogue is one of modern thoughts and its usage is also new.

Further, this is an argument for its modernity and novelty that with the coming into being of United Nations in the second half of 20th century, for all the International agreements there seems no connection of dialogue.¹

C. Theological Basis for religious Dialogue:

The whole corpus of Quranic Revelations invites Muslims to enter dialogue with people of other faiths and especially with Christians and Jews. Additionally, the Quran delineates the basic principles of meta-religion, a common ground for a meaningful inter-religious dialogue.² The following verses indicate this fact:

"ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ..... الآية." ³

"Invite (all) to the way of the Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching. And argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious."

It is understood from this verse that the Holy Quran does not make any difference among people in terms of dialogue and proclaiming its message.

While the Quran commands Muslims to enter into dialogue with all people, it attributes special attention to the Abrahamic religions by saying:

"وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ وَقُولُوا آمَنَّا بِالَّذِي أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأَنْزَلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَإِلَهُنَّ وَاحِدٌ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ" ⁴

¹- Al-Bayan, Op. Cit, p.26

²- Aasi, Ghulam Hyder, Muslim Understanding of other Religions: A Study of Ibn Hazm's Kitab Al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwa wa al-Nihal, (Islamabad: the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Islamic Research Institute, 2004), p.18

³- Surah Al-Nahl: 125

⁴- Surah Al-Ankaboot: 46

"And dispute ye not with the people of the Book except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who infect wrong (and injury) but say, 'we believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our Allah and your Allah is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam).'"

In another verse, the Holy Quran invites both Christians and Jews to have dialogue with Muslims saying as:

"قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ"¹

"Say: 'O people of the Book! Come to common terms as between you and us that we worship none but God that we associate no partners with him that we erect not from among ourselves, lords and patrons other than God. If, then they turn back, say: 'Ye bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to God's will).'"

However, while the Quran invites both Christians and Jews to come to the common terms; it sees the Christians as being nearer to the Muslims than the Jews. It says:

"لَتَجِدَنَّ أَشَدَّ النَّاسِ عَدَاوَةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا وَلَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُمْ مَوَدَّةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصَارَى ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قِسْطِينَ وَرَهْبَانًا وَهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ"²

"Strongest among men in enmity to the Believers with thou find the Jews and pagans; and the nearest among them in love to the believers with thou find those who say, 'We are Christians because amongst those are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant.'" "

The term "*Ahl Al-Kitab*" (People of the book) is used in the Holy Quran for Christians and Jews.

As Alawi explains that as for the people of the Book, the Quran referred to them under the term "*Ahl Al-Kitab*" (People of the Book). *Ahl Al-Kitab*, the word *Ahl* always signifies a family

¹ - Surah Aal-e-Imran: 64

² - Surah Al-Ma'eda: 82

relationship (wife, husband and children) the phrase, *Ahl Al-Kitab*, therefore, should be translated as the family of the Book. The Holy Quran further enjoins all people of faith to show affection and kindness to their near relations."¹

Islam has generally tolerant attitude towards both these religions as compared to polytheism that was strictly opposed by Islam. Especially, Muslims' relations with Christians were very friendly since the very beginning of Islam.

d. Kinds of Dialogue according to Muslim Scholars:

I: Invitation Dialogue:

"This had been the way of Prophets, their successors, scholars and preachers of virtue".

This is the way and program of Muslim *Ummah* and is the reason of its superiority to other nations. The subject of this 'dialogue' is the word "*Sawa*" (سواء) for which following command of Allah Almighty argues as below:

"قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ
وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ
تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ"²

"Say! 'Oh people of the Book! Come to common terms as between you and us that we worship none but God that we associate no partners with Him. that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and partners other than God. If then they turn back, say ye: 'Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to God's will)'".

"This *Sawa* here is used to highlight that the Prophet (PBUH) did not bring a new religion, rather it was the same belief in oneness of Allah and worshipping Him. This is the message preached by all the Messengers."³

¹-Alawi, Shihab (Nahadatul Ulama, Jakarta, Indonesia), Christian-Muslim Relations into the Twenty-first century, (art) Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, (Vol.15, Issue No.1, January 2004), p.73

²- Surah Aal-e-Imran: 64

³-see Zia-ul-Quran, (Lahore: Zia-ul-Quran Publication), vol.1, pp.239-240, see also Al-Mawdoodi, Abu Al-Ala. Tafheem-ul-Quran, (Lahore: Tarjuman-ul-Quran), vol.1, pp.261-262

Elmalili Hamdi Yazir, a famous Turkish Qur'anic interpreter, made the following interesting observations regarding this verse:

It has been shown how various consciences, nations, religions, and books can unite in one essential conscience and of truth, and how Islam has taught the human realm such a wide, open and true path of salvation and law of freedom. It has been shown fully that this is not limited to the Arab or non-Arab. Religious progress is possible not by consciences being narrow and separate from each other, but by their being universal and broad.¹

To the way and style of this dialogue, general meaning of the following commandment by Allah S.W.T. reasons as below:

"ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ..... الآية."²

"Invite (all) to the way of the Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching, and argue them with in ways that are the best and the most gracious".

The practicality of this commandment is found in the invitation of the Holy Prophet – peace be upon him – to *Ahl Al-Kitab* (Jews of Medina, Christians of Najran and different kings through letters). Then the *Sahaba*, *Tab'een* and the pious saints adopted the same strategy. For example, dialogue of *Hazrat Ja'far Ibn Abi Talib* and his companions with *Najjashi* and the religious leaders of his Court, and guidance by Respected *Sahaba* for the affairs with the inhabitants of conquered regions, and role of prominent scholars addressing the *Ahl Al-Kitab*.³

¹ - The Light, (compiled), M. FETHULLAH GULEN (Essays-Perspectives-Opinions), (Turkey, Istanbul: Mega Basim, October 2004), p.44

See for more details "The Necessity of Interfaith Dialogue" (art) M. FETHULLAH GULEN, pp.33-54

Note: This article was presented originally as a paper at the Parliament of the World's Religions, (Cap Town: December 1-8, 1999. It appeared as a revised edition in Turkish Daily News (January 11-12, 2000) And The Fountain 3: 31 (July-Sept. 2000), pp.7-8

² - Surah Al-Nahl: 125

³ - Al-Bayan (Al-Saudia, Al-Riyadh, February 2003), No.184, p.25

II: Shar'ee and Political Dialogue:

It is that condition of dialogue which movements of Muslim Ummah adopt. This helps for combined benefits and for being good neighbor and having mutual understanding of life.

Such kinds of dialogue are assigned to the intellectuals of common affairs and agreements, estimate general rules and regulations, advantages and disadvantages makes it conditioned.

This style of dialogue for living together is seen in the establishment of Islamic State in Medina when the Holy Prophet – peace be upon him – contracted with Jews of Medina and decided the dispute of *Hudaibia* with the *Quresh*.¹

e. Muslim-Christian Relations and Dialogue in Tradition:

Muslims' relations with Christians seem to be natural because of monotheism and with pagans (they are different) because of polytheism. Whenever there was conflict between Roman Empire and Persian Empire (both super powers), Arabs were also divided into two groups. The Muslims favored Christians (Romans) whereas pagans (*Quresh*) were allies of Persian Empire.

Quran explains it in Surah Rum when Persians conquered Christians. Arab pagans (*Quresh*) celebrated this event. At that time, the Holy Prophet – peace be upon him– received this revelation from Allah S.W.T.:

”الْمُغْلِبَتِ الرُّومُ فِي أَدْنَى الْأَرْضِ وَهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ غَلِبِهِمْ سَيَغْلِبُونَ فِي بَضْعِ
سِنِينَ لِلَّهِ الْأَمْرُ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَمِنْ بَعْدِ وَيَوْمَئِذٍ يَفْرَحُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ بِنَصْرِ اللَّهِ يَنْصُرُ
مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ”²

“Alif Laam Meem O The Roman Empire has been defeated O a land close by; but they, (even) after (this) defeat of theirs, will soon be victorious O within a few years with Allah's decision, in the past and in the future: on that day shall the believers rejoice O with the help of Allah, He helps whom He wills and He is exalted in might, most Merciful”

These verses clearly explained that if Meccan pagans rejoice on the success of the Persians against Christians, a time

¹- Ibid.

²- Surah Al-Room: 1-5

will come that monotheistic Christians would regain their lost ground from polytheist Persians. So Muslims would there rejoice on.

This happened after one or two years of the Hijra to Medina, when Romans had defeated the Persians. This celebration was doubled as Muslims had themselves defeated the Meccan pagans in the battle of Badr and was proud of it.

The pro-pagan Quresh rejoiced exceedingly and redoubled their taunts and persecution against the Holy Prophet – peace be upon him – whose message was the renewal of Christ's message.

The companions of the Prophet made the first migration – peace be upon him – of Islam to Abyssinia (the Christian Country) in 615 A.D., where they became refugees to protect themselves from the persecution and hostility of Meccans (Idol-worshippers) against them. The protection was provided to them by the Christian King. On this occasion, Hazrat Ja'far bin Abi Talib and his companions had a dialogue with Negus and his religious leaders at the Court.

Then, after migration of the Holy Prophet – peace be upon him – to Medina the Holy Prophet – peace be upon him – send to him a letter where he invited him to Islam. The Negus responded to the letter of the Holy Prophet – peace be upon him – in a good manner and became Muslim. Therefore, the Holy Prophet – peace be upon him – prayed for Negus after his death.

As B. Lewis admits this reality in his book *"the Arabs in History"* to manifest this spirit of the amity, by virtue of the Prophet Muhammad's – peace be upon him – cognizance of fellowship of faith with the Christian community, and the common monotheistic descent of Abraham, the Prophet – peace be upon him – decided to send his defenseless followers to migrate to Abyssinia to seek protection from the chief Christian country in the area. And when the news of the death of Negus reached to the Holy Prophet Muhammad – peace be upon him – he urged his companions to extend prayers for their brother who died in another land.¹

¹ - Alawi, Shihab, Christian-Muslim Relations into the Twenty-first century, (art) Op. Cit, p.73

So it is proved by this event that the relations of the Holy Prophet – peace be upon him – with Negus (the Christian State) were very good at that time.

The most impressive Christian-Muslim encounter was in the life of the Holy Prophet – peace be upon him – when a deputation from Najran came to Medina. It received a very good response. They demanded a trust-worthy and honest person. The Prophet – peace be upon him – sent Abu Ubaida Ibn Al-Jurrah with them. Favoring Christians in Medina, the Prophet of Islam – peace be upon him – permitted them to use his Mosque for their prayers. Further, there was an agreement of providing the Muslims with fixed amount of garments or silver and some weapons in case of conflict with Yemen. The people of Najran were placed under the protection of Allah Almighty and His Prophet – peace be upon him – and their souls, creed, land, property and churches were to be safeguarded.

The people of Najran again came to Medina to embrace Islam. The treaty remained upheld by both Muslims and Christians till the death of the Holy Prophet – peace be upon him –. Then, it was confirmed by Abu Bakr, but in the period of Hazrat Umar they were expelled from their lands, as they started charging interest. However, they were given full protection and honor that the Prophet – peace be upon him – and Abu Bakr had written for them.¹

From this we can conclude that:

1. Dialogue with Christians is allowed on the basis of Religion and politics.
2. The dialogue should be with flexible attitudes towards them.
3. They may be allowed to offer prayer in Mosque.
4. Their life, property and churches must be protected if they are under Islamic Rule.
5. The most important effect of such relationship is to bring them closer to the true teachings of Islam.

¹ - See for more details, Von Denffer, Ahmad, Christians in the Quran and the Sunnah, (UK, Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, (1987), pp.21-28

f. Some Practical Realities and Dialogue:

This is the reason that Islam has treated the Christians and the Jews with favor. This attitude has four main aspects that are as follows:

I: Believing in One God:

In the Holy Qur'an, the *Ahl Al-Kitab* (People of the Book) are invited to unite with Muslims on the basis of *Tawhid*. As Allah has said:

"قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ"¹

"Say O people of the book! Come to common terms as between us and you that we worship none but God that we associate no partners with Him that we erect not from among ourselves lords and patrons other than God. If, then they turn back, say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to God's will)".

The same message was conveyed by the Holy Prophet (PBUH) to the Christians of *Najran*. They had stayed as the guests of the Prophet (PBUH) in the mosque of the Prophet (Masjid-e-Nabwi). The letters written to the Christian rulers by the Holy Prophet (PBUH) also contained the same thing. This stated:

"Let us move to a slogan (*Tawhid*) which is common between the both".²

The previous Prophets (May Allah's Mercy be upon them) had also called the people to this central point of Islam. So to have dialogue with the people of other religions, this is the first and basic point. Islam, Christianity and Judaism are called Abrahamic faiths and Hazrat Ibrahim (May Allah's mercy be upon him) was the forefather, as has been stated in the Holy Qur'an:

"... وَمَا جَعَلْ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ مِلَّةَ أَبِيكُمْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ هُوَ سَمَّاكُمُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ ... الْآيَةُ"¹

¹ Surah Aal-e-Imran: 64

² Ibn-e-Sa'ad, Abu Abdullah Muhammad. At-Tabaqat-ul-Kubra, (Lebanon, Beirut: Dar Ihya At-Turath Al-Arabi, vol.1, p.177, 1994)

See also Al-Tabari, vol. 2, p.576

"And He has not laid upon you any narrowness in the matter of religion. Follow the faith of your father Abraham. He it is who has named you Muslims".

At another place, it has been stated:

"قُلْ إِنِّي هَدَانِي رَبِّي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ دِينًا قَيِّمًا مِثْلَ آبِرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ"²

Say you: "Surely as for me. My Lord has guided me to the straight path that is, the right religion, the faith of Abraham the upright one, aloof from all falsehood, and inclined exclusively to the truth and he was not a polytheist".

"وَمَنْ يَزْعِبْ عَنْ مِلَّةِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّا مِنْ سَفِيَةِ نَفْسِهِ... الْآيَةِ."³

And who can ever turn away from the religion of Abraham (On him be peace) except he who has made a fool of himself?

II: Ahl Al-Kitab's Zabeehah:

Food is a very important need in the human life as life cannot be independent of it. In Islamic ideology, only that eatable can be used which is prepared according to Islamic teachings. As far as Ahl Al-Kitab are concerned, Muslims are allowed to eat the things prepared and slaughtered by them. Allah states in the Holy Qur'an to Muslims:

"الْيَوْمَ أَحْلَلْ لَكُمْ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَطَعَامُ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ حَلٌّ لَكُمْ وَطَعَامُكُمْ حَلٌّ لَهُمْ ... الْآيَةِ."⁴

This day are made lawful to you all good and pure things. And the food of those to whom the book was given is lawful to you and your food is lawful for them.

Similarly in the Hadith of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) we find the same thing. He stated:

¹ Surah Al-Haj: 78

² Surah Al-An'am: 161

³ Surah Al-Baqara: 130

⁴ Surah Al-Ma'eda: 5

III: Marriages Allowed with Ahl Al-Kitab:

Marriage is an important need of man and the family life depends upon the marriage. In Islamic style of life, it is stressed to create an atmosphere of understanding. For that reason, it was forbidden to marry the polytheists. In the Holy Qur'ān, it is stated:

وَلَا تَنْكِحُوا الْمُشْرِكَاتِ حَتَّى يُؤْمِنَ وَلَّامَةً مُؤْمِنَةً خَيْرٌ مِنْ مُشْرِكَةٍ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَتْكُمْ وَلَا تُنْكِحُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَتَّى يُؤْمِنُوا وَلَعَيْدٌ مُؤْمِنٌ خَيْرٌ مِنْ مُشْرِكٍ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَكُمْ ... الْآيَةُ.¹

And do not marry idolatresses until they believe and certainly Muslim slave women are better than a free idolatress even though she may attract you. And do not give your women in marriage to idolatresses until they believe and certainly a Muslim slave is better than a free idolater even though he may attract you

But the Ahl Al-Kitab women are exceptions from this command as Allah (S.W.T) has said:

"...وَالْمُحْصَنَاتُ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ إِذَا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ أَجُورَهُنَّ مُحْصِنِينَ غَيْرَ مُسَافِحِينَ وَلَا مُتَّخِذِي أَخْدَانٍ ... الْآيَةُ."²

And lawful are the chaste believing women and chaste women from among those who were given the book before you, after you have given them their dowries in chaste conduct as properly wedded women and not in fornication, nor taking them as mistresses in secret.

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said the following about this matter.

عن جابر (رضي الله عنه) قال: قال رسول الله (صلى الله عليه وسلم) ن تزوج نساء أهل الكتب و لا يتزوجون نساءنا.³

Narrated Hadrat Jabir (Radi Allahu 'Anhu), the holy Prophet (PBUH) said that we can marry the women of Ahl Al-Kitab but they cannot marry our women.

¹- Surah Al-Baqara: 221

²- Surah Al-Ma'eda: 5

³-Jalaluddin, Abdur Rahman, Ad-Durr-ul-Mansur fi At-Tafsir bil Al-Masoor, (Iran, Qum: Manshurat, Maktaba Aya-tul-Alazimi, vol. 2, without date), p.261

So on the basis of these teachings of Islam, we can not only marry the women of Ahl Al-Kitab without any change in their religion, rather they are even allowed to retain their respective religion after the marriage.

IV: Financial Support to Ahl Al-Kitab:

The real social justice is developed through the economic sources of the country. The people are to be provided with the basic needs of life. In Islamic system, *Zakat* (Charity) fulfils these needs for the poor and needy. Only the Muslim pays *Zakat* but Ahl Al-Kitab can also benefit from it. This is their third distinguished feature of Islam's attitude towards Ahl Al-Kitab. Hadrat Umar Farooq (Radi Allahu 'Anhu) wrote a letter to the person in charge of the Bait-ul-Mal (Muslim exchequer) which supports this fact. He stated that Allah's command,

"إِنَّمَا الصَّدَقَاتُ لِلْفُقَرَاءِ وَالْمَسْكِينِ ... الآية."¹

Means charity is for Ahl Al-Kitab (The needy ones)²

Islam's respectable and distinguished attitude towards Ahl Al-Kitab is appreciable. They have got status in Islamic society because Islam lays stress for special status for Ahl Al-Kitab as compared to the people of the other religions. For them, Islam attitude is according to the commandments of Allah. In the Holy Qur'ān, Allah has stated:

"لَتَجِدَنَّ أَشَدَّ النَّاسِ عَدَاوَةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا وَلَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُمْ مَوَدَّةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصَارَىٰ ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَسِيصِينَ وَرَهْبَانًا وَاللَّهُمَّ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ"³

Surely you will find of all the people the most bitter in enmity against the Muslims to be the Jews and the polytheists. And surely you will find the nearest in friendship to the believers those caused to say: "We are Nazarenes (Christians)". This, because

¹ - Surah Al-Tauba: 60

² - Noman, Shibli, Al-Farooq (Lahore: Maktab-e-Rahmania, vol. 2, without date), p.383

³ - Surah Al-Ma'eda: 82

there among them men learning and monks and they are not stiff-necked and proud.

In this verse, a friendly attitude is instructed towards the Christians. As a result, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) had always a tolerant attitude towards the Christians throughout his life. They were supported extraordinarily. The pact with the people of Najran is a proof of that.

لتجران جوار و ذمة محمد النبي (صلى الله عليه و سلم) على أنفسهم و ملتهم و ارضهم و اموالهم و غائبهم و شاهدهم و عشيرتهم و تبعهم و لا يغير لما كانوا عليه و لا يغير حق من حقوقهم و لا يغير لما تحت ايديهم من قليل أو كثير.¹

The people of Najran have got security of God and are responsibility of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Their life and religion, property and all their people whether present there or not are included in this responsibility. They will not be changed. Their rights will remain the same and anything owned by them will remain theirs.

The Christians of rest of Arabia were also given such kind of facilities. Arnold has explained them in detail. He states:

*"The Prophet of Allah Muhammad (PBUH) himself had some agreements with Christian tribes. He had promised them security and freedom for their religion. Besides, he promised them retaining of rights and authorities of the priests."*²

Dr. Muhammad Hameedullah describes the following notable incident in his article "The friendly relations of Islam with Christianity and how they deteriorated";

After fifteen years of Muslims migration to a Christian country, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) entered Makkah as a conqueror.

This was the city from where the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions were compelled to migrate to Madina. At the return to Makkah, a strange incident happened. Arzaqi has narrated this in "Akhbar-e-Makkah" an authentic book. All the historians had

¹ - Hamidullah, Dr, Muhammad, Rasoolullah Ki Siasi Zindagi, (Karachi: Dar-ul-Isha'at, 1980), p.273

² - Arnold, T. W, Dawat-e-Islam, (trans.) Inayatullah, (Meiqm-e-Uqaf , Punjab, Lahore, 1976), p.37

followed him. Arzaqi states that at the conquest of Makkah (Fath-e-Makkah) in 8th Hijra, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) had broken all the idols and removed them out of Ka'ba. Then he entered Ka'ba and saw many colorful pictures painted on the walls. He was hurt at this because that was the place for worship. He ordered to erase all of them. But he put his hand on one of them and forbade erasing it. This was the picture of Holy Mary and his son, the Christ (*Alaih-e-salam*).¹

This shows how much sympathy the Holy Prophet (PBUH) had with the Christ and his followers.

Conclusion:

To conclude, it can be stated that dialogue is not something new. Its origins right from the beginning. The Holy Quran and the Hadith as quoted earlier guide the Muslims to have dialogical relations with the non-Muslims. Islam is a religion of peace and its true spirit is to form a peaceful society. Though people might defer in their religious, social, and cultural approaches yet there must be harmony among them. It not only helps them live peacefully but also to understand one and other's ideology. Dialogue in Islam has got theological basis. It may occur in different forms. The views of many Muslim thinkers discussed here, further clarify the concept of dialogue and its importance in the Muslim societies. Ahle-e-Kitab (Christians & Jews) are granted to be shared in Muslim's life, for example believing in one God, eating food stuff with them, having bond of marriage with them, or having financial affairs with them. It is of prime importance for Muslims to study Islam as well as other heavenly religions so that they may become able to present Islam mere effectively. In this regard, the incident of the people of Najran is of key importances which guide us to live with non-Muslims peacefully and cooperatively.

¹ - Alam-e-Islam-aor-Esayait, July-September, pp.12-13

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